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ABSTRACT

Educational institutions were among the pioneers in the development of radio broadcasting. By 1938, over 300 colleges reported offering at least one course in radio. In more recent times the surveys compiled by Harold Niven for the "Journal of Broadcasting" show a continued interest in broadcasting courses. The trend is toward Communications or Radio-TV Departments. Three general philosophies have arisen about how to best teach students about broadcasting: (1) the liberal arts philosophy, an introduction to the field of broadcasting; (2) the practical philosophy, an attempt to furnish complete professional training for employment; and (3) the liberal professional philosophy, a broad liberal arts background plus professional training for first job skills and a basic knowledge of the industry. The practical, professional curriculum has drawbacks: half of all broadcast majors do not find jobs in broadcasting; and acting, writing, and directing, which are most exciting to students and most appealing to teachers, are least likely to provide work opportunities for graduates. (WR)

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Broadcasting: Does it Belong in the Department of Speech?

Traditional Concepts in Speech and Broadcasting

by Robert J. Greene

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Educational institutions were among the pioneers in the development of radio broadcasting. At the University of Wisconsin, WHA began operation in January 1921, and by 1925 there were 171 educational organizations with stations on the air--nearly a third of all the radio stations in the country.[1] It was not until around 1930, however, that course work in broadcasting began to appear. The University of Southern California gets credit for offering the first broadcasting course in 1929.[2] By 1938, over 300 colleges reported offering at least one course in radio.

In more recent times the surveys compiled by Harold Niven for the Journal of Broadcasting show a continued interest in broadcasting courses. The first Niven survey in 1956 reported 116 colleges offering courses, 73 of them in Speech Departments.[3] The summer 1972 survey shows 304 colleges offering broadcasting courses, 91 of them in Departments of Speech.[4]

Admittedly these figures represent only those who responded to the survey and are, therefore, not all-inclusive. At any rate, many schools are actively engaged in broadcast training. The number of institutional members in The Association for Professional Broadcasting Education has grown from 33 in 1956 to 170 in 1972.[5] I think it's interesting to note that the Niven surveys show 63% of broadcasting courses in 1956 were offered in Speech Departments compared with 30% today.[6] Other departments offering such courses are English, Communications, Radio and Television, and Journalism.

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The trend is toward Communications or Radio-TV Departments. This is not surprising. Each academic area originated as an offshoot of some other area and eventually achieved a life of its own. For instance, in the Middle Ages, if one wanted a BA degree, he studied the trivium--grammar, rhetoric, and logic. He could get a Master's Degree in three more years by studying the quadrivium--arithmetic, music, geometry, and astronomy. Together the trivium and the quadrivium made up the seven Liberal Arts. From these curricula all others have evolved. Speech, of course, is a child of rhetoric, although in modern education, a Speech Department is likely an offshoot of the English Department. Most early broadcasting courses were offered in departments of English or Speech due to the importance to the audience of the "announcer", although they often included considerably more than announcing. A typical early course description read: "Radio Speaking - This course is taught four times during the year. It is a general course in the field of radio. Included in it is a study of announcing, advertising, public speaking, program building, continuity writing, or cutting and adapting of radio drama. Regular school year."[7] Surely a tall order for a single course.

But the truth of the matter is, broadcasting does encompass many fields. As Edgar Willis says, writing in The Encyclopedia of Education

> A student of radio and television enters the fields of engineering and physics when he considers the technical aspects of the media. He does what is usually done in English courses when he writes scripts or studies the literature of broadcasting. He is involved in the acts of speech and drama when he practices announcing, acting, producing, and directing; in the art of music when he designs and produces musical programs; and in the art of journalism when he prepares copy for news broadcasts. He enters the fields of sociology, psychology, and political science when he becomes concerned with the social and political effects of

broadcasting; he comes into contact with the law when he examines broadcast regulation; and he touches on the fields of economics and business administration when he studies the advertising support of broadcasting.[8]

In our own college library, I counted 34 different ways of cataloguing material dealing with broadcasting.

The question arises: In view of this seeming diversity of subject matter, how can one best teach students about broadcasting? Three general philosophies have arisen: (1) The Liberal Arts philosophy with just an introduction to the field of broadcasting. A typical summary of this philosophy might be, "Our endeavor is not to train men specifically for the broadcasting industry, but to provide education which will result in graduates capable of communicating effectively, and then to assist them to the fullest if they desire a career in mass media."; (2) The Practical Philosophy, which attempts to furnish "complete" professional training for employment; and (3) The Liberal Professional Philosophy--a broad liberal arts background plus professional training for "first job skills" and a basic knowledge of the industry.

Each of the philosophies has its advocates. Perhaps none of them is entirely satisfactory. For instance, if one teaches a practical, professional curriculum he meets several drawbacks: (1) half of all broadcast majors don't find jobs in broadcasting, so for them narrow professional training is not helpful; (2) those aspects of the profession which are most exciting to students and most appealing to teachers are least likely to provide work opportunities for graduates--acting, writing, and directing, for example.

On the other hand, if one has the liberal arts philosophy, he also

runs into problems: (1) teaching of specific skills and techniques seems to some antithetical to the philosophy of a liberal education; (2) undergraduate students in broadcasting courses often view these courses as a step in a program of vocational education whereas the college sees them as links in a general education program; (3) its complicated to include graduate students pursuing professional aims in the same course with liberal arts undergraduates.[9] Perhaps a solution that meets the needs of most students is in the direction voiced by a professor who said, "We have gradually moved further and further in the direction of trying to give our major students a broad understanding of the institution of broadcasting, and less and less attention to studio production, microphone speech, and to writing for radio and television."[10]

Notes

1. U. S., Federal Communications Commission, Information Bulletin No. 21-13, September 1966, pp. 1-2.

2. Smith, Leslie, "Education for Broadcasting: 1929-1963", Journal of Broadcasting, Vol. 8 (1963-64), p. 384.

3. Niven, Harold F., "Colleges and Universities Offering Course Work in Radio and Television", Journal of Broadcasting, Vol. 1 (1956-57), pp. 97-110.

4. Niven, Harold, "Thirteenth Survey of Colleges and Universities Offering Courses in Broadcasting, 1971-72", Journal of Broadcasting, Vol. XVI (1971-72), pp. 331-370.

5. Head, Sidney W. and Martin, Leo A., "Broadcasting and Higher Education: A New Era", Journal of Broadcasting, Vol. 1 (1956-57), p. 45 and Journal of Broadcasting, Vol. 16, front cover.

6. Niven, op. cit.

7. Koon, Cline M., "Teaching Broadcasting", Radio News, XV, November, 1933, p. 267, in Smith, op. cit.

8. Willis, Edgar, "Training for Broadcasting", The Encyclopedia of Education, Vol. 1, Crowell-Collier Educational Corporation, 1971.

9. Willis, ibid.

10. Niven, Harold, "The Development of Broadcasting Education in Institutions of Higher Education", Journal of Broadcasting, Vol. 5 (1960-61), p. 249.